

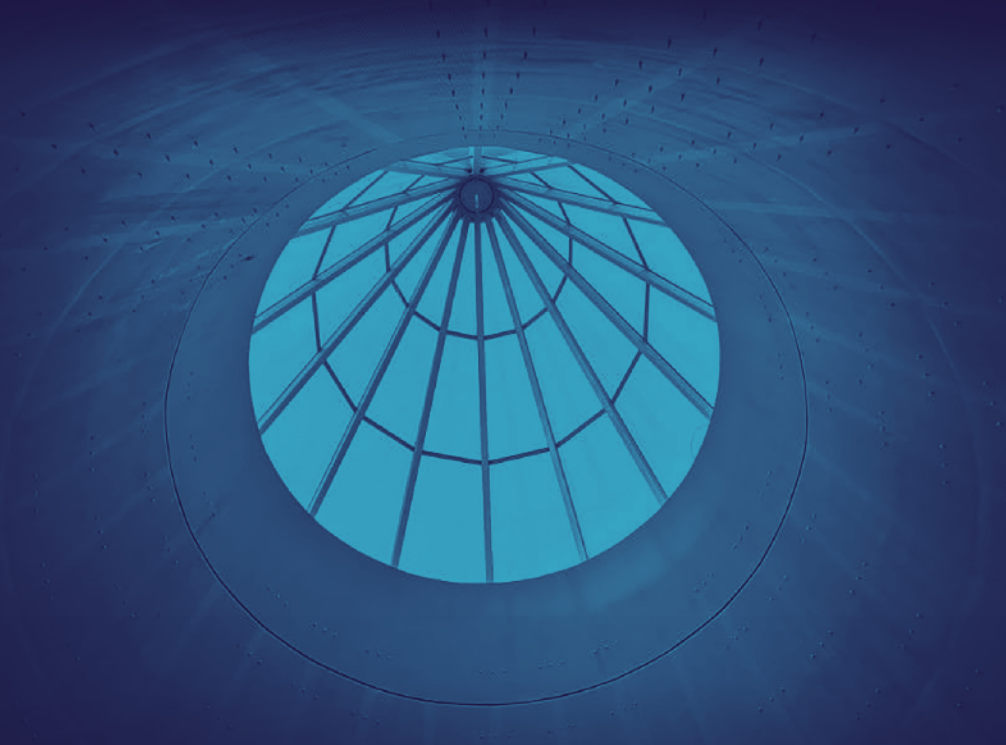


University of  
**Nottingham**  
Rights Lab

# Campaigning for change:

**The Co-op's approach to  
tackling modern slavery and  
supporting victims**

March 2021



It's what we do

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“This report explores the meaning and lessons of how the Co-op applied its own vision, identity and principles to the delivery of a major campaign”

# Introduction

“They want to do the right things... and by doing those right things, they’re demonstrating those credentials on a daily basis.”

—Simon Murray, Dixons Carphone

## The report

In 2017, at the Co-op’s Annual General Meeting (AGM), members voted for the Co-op to campaign on modern slavery and, specifically, better victim support.

In launching the modern slavery campaign that followed, Co-op believed that its position as a key business leader in the community, and its particular commitments, values and principles, placed it in a potentially influential position to address the problem of modern slavery in supply chains and communities. Following its principle that no person should be left behind, the Co-op embarked on a number of campaign activities with a key purpose of giving survivors of modern slavery the opportunity to take back control of their lives.

Throughout all of its campaign activities, including the modern slavery campaign (January 1, 2017 to June 30, 2020), the Co-op has sought independent assessments of its actions. Its campaign on modern slavery has been recognised with national and global awards, including the Thomson Reuters Stop Slavery Award. However, in 2020, the Co-op asked the Rights Lab (University of Nottingham) to analyse its modern slavery campaign in detail, so that it could learn further lessons, identify potential improvements to its campaigning approach in the future, and share key takeaways with the wider business community.

The Rights Lab completed a full, independent evaluation of the Co-op’s modern slavery campaign activities for response and use by the Co-op, as well as this current “evidence in practice” report of March 2021 that identifies the Co-op’s key model for how to campaign for social change. In analysing the Co-op’s campaign of 2017-2020, Rights Lab researchers analysed and theorised the Co-op’s modern slavery campaign and identified transferable lessons. This report offers a framework for understanding the campaign’s purpose and value, and suggests key takeaways for other businesses that may seek to take a leading role in anti-slavery, or other human rights and social justice issues.

The Rights Lab’s research involved:

1. a review of publicly accessible documents plus internal documents supplied by the Co-op, including strategy documents, campaign documents, and emails
2. semi-structured interviews with external stakeholders and senior leaders at the Co-op
3. an online survey of internal and external stakeholders



The Co-op's modern slavery campaign activity took place before the coronavirus pandemic. This report does not include an assessment of the pandemic's impact on how businesses are prioritising and addressing social issues, including modern slavery. However, survey data from other Rights Lab research suggests that all aspects of modern slavery survivors' lives in the UK have been negatively impacted to varying degrees by Covid-19, including access to work.<sup>1</sup> The Co-op's campaign activities, including the Bright Future programme, will only become *more* vital in the context of the pandemic and in its aftermath.

The full evaluation was authored by Rights Lab (University of Nottingham) researchers Dr Reem Muaid (Research Fellow in Modern Slavery and Business Responses), and Dr Akilah Jardine (Research Fellow in Antislavery Business and Communities), with additional inputs from Emily Kenway (Policy Fellow) and project management from Anneke Love (Research Projects Officer). This report was authored by Dr Reem Muaid, Dr Akilah Jardine, Professor Zoe Trodd (Rights Lab Director), and Professor Kevin Bales CMG (Rights Lab Research Director).



Pictured: Passage – image from Hestia's 'Art is Freedom' project.

## The Co-op

The Co-op is the world's oldest and the UK's largest consumer co-operative, with over 4 million members and over 60 thousand employees, with a history of fair trading that dates back to its founding in the 19th century. It originated from the principles established by the Rochdale Pioneers in 1844, a group of mill workers who championed a different way of doing business: a business that would be owned by its members and that would support the communities it serves. The Co-op draws on this inspirational history by committing to care for others, to improve the lives of people within and outside the organisation, to use its co-operative as a vehicle for change in addressing social injustice and, ultimately, to stand up for what it believes in.

In line with the International Co-operative Alliance, a federation representing co-operatives worldwide, the Co-op's identity is based on six core values:

- **Self-help** – uniting members to help make a difference in society
- **Self-responsibility** – empowering members to take responsibility individually by supporting its activities
- **Democracy** – ensuring that all members have a say in how the organisation is run
- **Equality** – ensuring that all members are able to get involved in activities
- **Equity** – promoting and upholding fairness
- **Solidarity** – leveraging the collective identity of its members to strengthen the organisation and its activities

As Co-op CEO Steve Murrells has explained, Co-op's stated vision of "co-operating for a fairer world" focuses on making things fairer for "colleagues, communities and the Planet." Given its identity and roots as a co-operative, the Co-op has a long history of leveraging its position to advocate on issues such as workers' rights and climate change. Additionally, it has embarked on a number of time-bound specific campaigns to address issues such as the use of neonicotinoids, reducing inequalities, promoting safer communities, tackling loneliness and, since 2017, tackling modern slavery. In 2020, Co-op members raised £15 million for investment into local causes and issues.

The Co-op believes that businesses will succeed in the long-term if they combine social purpose with commercial agility and innovation. This report explores the meaning and lessons of how the Co-op applied this belief, and its own vision, identity and principles, to the delivery of a major campaign for rights and justice.

Over  
**60 thousand**  
employees  
Over **4 million**  
members

The world's  
oldest and the  
UK's largest  
**consumer**  
**co-operative**



## Fighting modern slavery: one Co-op Christmas sandwich at a time



We're donating **£50,000** from the sales of our Christmas sandwich and roll range to global charity **Stop The Traffik** to help end human trafficking.

### Try our Co-op Christmas sandwich range:

- Co-op Irresistible Pigs Under Blankets Sandwich
- Co-op Irresistible Beetroot Smoked Salmon and Dill Cream Cheese sandwich
- Co-op Turkey Feast Sandwich
- Co-op Boxing Day Lunch Sandwich



**64,241**  
actions calling on the Government to  
protect victims of slavery in the UK

Pictured, clockwise: Sandwich campaign poster, Business Against Slavery forum, ASI Charter Group, campaign packaging photograph and Stop The Traffik social media screenshot.



# The Co-op's Modern Slavery Campaign

“The campaign has led the field amongst retailers in tackling and supporting victims of Modern Slavery, leading by example and driving an agenda that is sometimes hidden.”

—Andy York, Pilgrims Ltd

## Business action

The Co-op's goal with its modern slavery campaign of 2017-2020 was to play a part in the global movement to end modern slavery—now a target within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, as target 8.7: “take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking.” To achieve its overarching goal, the Co-op's campaign objective was to ensure that survivors of modern slavery have the support and opportunity they need to aid their recovery and reintegration into society.

Modern slavery is an umbrella term used to describe a range of exploitative practices such as slavery, servitude, forced labour, human trafficking and related practices. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and Walk Free estimate that 40.3 million people are enslaved worldwide, including many in the UK.<sup>2</sup> The National Referral Mechanism – the UK's process for identifying and safeguarding victims – identified 10,627 potential victims in 2019. Modern slavery is a priority issue for the UK Government, which in 2015 passed world-leading legislation in the form of the Modern Slavery Act (MSA).

The Co-op's method to deliver its objective was to leverage its assets: its identity, leadership, members, employees, networks and relationships. In other words, the Co-op aligned its objective closely with its core identity, drawing on its history and values to campaign for change. This meant that across all elements of its modern slavery campaign, the Co-op turned its explicit value of “solidarity” into a focus on collaboration. As one survey respondent, Amelia Knott (Romanac Consulting Ltd), explained of the Co-op's modern slavery campaign, “the Co-op is particularly effective at engaging peer companies and are highly respected among those working towards similar goals....The Co-op is also highly collaborative....the Co-op's approach provides examples that I can use to engage other companies in the issue.”

For example, in 2018, when Anti-Slavery International established the Anti-Slavery Charter setting out the fundamental principles that organisations across the international community should adopt to tackle modern slavery, the Co-op took the lead in becoming the first business to sign the Charter—then encouraged other businesses to make the same pledge.<sup>3</sup> It sent direct emails to 111 private

“The Co-op aligned its objective closely with its core identity.”



companies in the UK, and at least six of those companies agreed to commit to the principles outlined in the Charter.

Also in 2018, the Co-op joined the Home Office's Business Against Slavery Forum (along with 12 other businesses), and organised a Greater Manchester Modern Slavery Business Network that brings together businesses, law enforcement, academics, local authorities, charities and other agencies to strengthen the business response to the problem of modern slavery. In 2019, the Co-op invited the Home Office to the Manchester business network in order to facilitate dialogue with the business community and to review the recommendations from the Independent Review of the MSA. In 2020 it joined other businesses to support a project to assess the benefit of free transport for survivors. The same year, it joined with other businesses and associations to sponsor and launch the Responsible Recruitment Toolkit (RRT), which supports suppliers to achieve responsible recruitment in their supply chains.<sup>4</sup>

Within and beyond its work in these collaborative networks and initiatives, the Co-op encouraged its business peers to have open and honest conversations about modern slavery risks in supply chains—to see it as not just a compliance issue, but an issue of social justice. A key component of the MSA is Section 54 on transparency in supply chains, which encourages transparency and accountability of the steps taken by businesses to tackle modern slavery in their supply chains and operations. Trying to level the playing field for business engagement on modern slavery, the Co-op led by example in this area of supply chain transparency. This included the active provision of evidence on the topic, responses to multiple consultations, and the submission of several briefs to parliamentarians.

Pointing to the Co-op's approach of going beyond mere compliance with the MSA—i.e. the annual publication of a Modern Slavery Statement—Kelly Tolhurst MP, Minister of State for Corporate Responsibility, observed: “The Government welcomes the leadership role the Co-op has taken in promoting transparency in supply chains and engaging with the Government and other leading businesses.” From the business community, a business leader respondent to the survey for this report confirmed that the Co-op “made us think more deeply about how Modern Slavery might manifest itself within our supply chain.” An NGO respondent for this report, Louise Gleich (CARE), explained that the Co-op's business leadership was important for anti-slavery action because it could access a different set of people—including other businesses: “I think it's really great to have a different voice outside of just the NGO sector and be able to reach into different spaces and speak to different people.”

Other respondents pointed to the fact that the Co-op leveraged its own identity as an ethical business in order to achieve this leadership. Ian Jarvey, Deputy Head of Procurement at the University of Manchester, said that “the Co-op certainly come across as a business that practices what it preaches.” From the charity sector, a survey respondent connected the Co-op's own brand to the ultimate impact of its campaign: “I think the impact is significant because the Co-op is well known and a good brand to have behind any campaign.”

In leveraging its own identity and history as an ethical, campaigning business, the Co-op itself explicitly recognised its ability to influence awareness within the business community. Alison Scowen, the Co-op's Senior Public Affairs Manager, explained to Rights Lab researchers that galvanising other businesses “was something we could do because of our reputation and perceptions within the business community of us as a different kind of business. Because we have a history of campaigning and social action, other businesses perceive us slightly

“....important for both their example to other businesses and for their collaborative, inclusive approach.”

differently and are, perhaps, more likely to take on board our approach than they might be with regard to PLCs [publicly listed companies], for instance. We also have a reputation for taking on board and campaigning on ‘unfashionable’ issues (or at least ‘unfashionable’ at the time).” The Co-op knew that it could lead by example on the issue of modern slavery, and so it actively encouraged others to go beyond the minimum requirements of the MSA.

## The Bright Future programme

The Co-op also recognised another aspect of its identity and history that could be leveraged for the campaign. While action was being taken by various and multiple stakeholders to tackle modern slavery in the UK and globally—such as strengthening law enforcement—its own focus on *communities* meant it could play an additional, unique role and focus on the vital area of modern slavery survivors' recovery and community reintegration.

Choosing to align its modern slavery campaign with its stated ambition of “championing a better way of doing business,” the Co-op therefore campaigned differently. Not only working as a business on the issue of transparency in supply chains, it launched a national campaign in support of a major new bill about long-term survivor support. And not only advocating for the bill and for survivor support, it chose to take action itself: it created a pioneering survivor support programme called Bright Future.

In March 2017, the Co-op launched the Bright Future programme to support survivors of modern slavery with paid work placements and employment opportunities in its food business, as part of their reintegration into communities. Launching the programme, the Co-op CEO Steve Murrells observed: “It is clear to me that victims need to be supported while they rebuild their lives and central to that is the dignity that paid, freely chosen employment provides. Without this, there is a real chance that they could fall back into the hands of those who have exploited them and for the terrible, unspeakable cycle of enslavement to begin again.”

**Bright Future**





The programme was based on an original concept developed by Stronger Together and City Hearts and brought to the Co-op. It was designed based on evidence that the key barriers to finding work for survivors include lack of qualifications, experience, employment references, and confidence. The Co-op collaborated with the charity City Hearts to identify survivors to join the programme. In a Westminster Hall Debate in October 2018, Gareth Snell MP characterised Bright Future as the Co-op bringing together “charities, providers and first responders to give people who have been through modern slavery a way into paid employment—a route back to dignity without waiting for charity.”

The initial aim of the Bright Future programme was to provide paid placements for 30 survivors a year to support them in living freely with dignity and to fully reintegrate them within society. As part of the programme, survivors are offered a placement at the Co-op's food stores, followed by a non-competitive interview for a permanent position. If the interview is successful and there is a vacancy available, the candidate will be offered a permanent job. As of May 2020, 75 survivors had been offered paid work experience, with 40 offered full-time employment at the end of their placement.

The programme has provided evidence for how survivors' lives can be improved by business action. As one survey respondent described the programme, it is “a best practice model in helping survivors to rebuild their lives.” Another, from the NGO sector, called the programme “really beneficial,” because it “brings that stability that is necessary as part of their recovery...we are delighted it's there.” Survivors reported that Bright Future helped them to acquire new skills, increased their confidence, and expanded their professional networks. All these gains are vital to the reintegration of survivors back into communities and to survivors successfully securing paid and sustainable employment.

As one NGO leader, Andrew Wallis (CEO of Unseen), explained in an interview for this report, the programme's success was due to how the Co-op approached it from the start—as a co-operative effort, in line with the organisation's very identity: it was “not just ‘here's a business response. This is what we think you need. Take it or leave it.’ It was co-created. I think that put the victim at the centre, in terms of thinking through what the hurdles were that needs to be overcome, what the requirements were in terms of support and what the potential outcomes would be for that individual.”

Crucially, and again in line with its collaborative approach, the Co-op encouraged other charities and businesses to join the programme. This ensured a wider availability of employment opportunities for survivors. The Co-op's reputation and position as a major food

“Trying to level the playing field for business engagement on modern slavery, the Co-op led by example in this area of supply chain transparency.”

retailer facilitated this collaboration, and the programme became a proof of concept for other businesses. Gareth Snell MP explained the power of this example across the business community: “I know many other companies are looking at the Co-op Group's work. All I can say to them is, ‘Go and ask, and help. They will help you become part of this life-changing partnership.’”

The number of businesses involved in the Bright Future programme increased each year since its launch – an indication of the businesses' keenness to be involved and of the Co-op's outreach. Bright Future has now transitioned into a new co-operative with 28 charities and 23 businesses working together. As one external stakeholder, Simon Murray (Dixons Carphone), explained in an interview for this report, the Co-op developed Bright Future “into something that then went on to being a multi-organization scheme,” then “managed to progress it to something that actually stands in its own right. It is now living and breathing things that can actually carry on.”

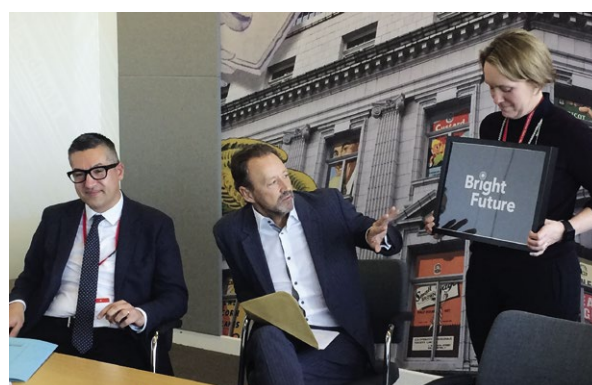
Another business confirmed in a survey for this report that Bright Future and the Co-op's modern slavery campaign were important for both their example to other businesses and for their collaborative, inclusive approach across the business community: “I wish my company could get as good at campaigning with a social purpose! What I loved about Bright Future was that there was an employment and survivor support component as well as a research component to it and that the Co-op tried to make it a broad church by partnering with other companies.”

## Advocating for survivors

Bright Future proved that survivor support was a key space in which businesses could have anti-slavery impact. The programme also gave the Co-op the ability to advocate with data and experience on behalf of a new bill before Parliament. Bright Future had highlighted to the Co-op a significant barrier for survivors in the UK: that only survivors with residency rights could benefit from the programme or access vital long-term support.

In 2017, House of Lords member Lord McColl of Dulwich tabled a Private Members' Bill that, if enacted, would provide for confirmed adult victims of modern slavery to receive a grant of leave to remain for 12 months, together with assistance and support during this period. This Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill failed to pass before the end of the Parliamentary session. In 2019, Lord McColl brought forward the Bill again, proposing to mandate support provisions for survivors, extend support to at least 12 months, and grant identified victims ‘leave to remain’ in the UK for a specific period of time. The Bill passed all stages in the Lords in 2019 but Parliament was dissolved before a Second Reading in the Commons. Lord McColl reintroduced the bill in 2020. Its progress was delayed by a Parliamentary focus on Brexit and Covid-19 but Lord McColl continues to express hope about its passage.

“Bright Future proved that survivor support was a key space in which businesses could have anti-slavery impact. The programme also gave the Co-op the ability to advocate with data and experience on behalf of a new bill before Parliament.”



Pictured: Steve Murrells, Co-op, Dr Richard Benjamin and Alison Scowen with the chosen logo.



Pictured: Students from the Co-op Academies.



Due to the insights that it gained from working with City Hearts and other charities on the Bright Future programme, the Co-op recognised the significance of Lord McColl's Bill. It first met with Lord McColl in July 2017, then supplied him with a briefing in August 2017 about the Bright Future programme and the value of paid work for victims, and the difficulties of providing paid work opportunities as part of the Bright Future programme—including due to immigration laws.

The briefing emphasised the importance of the Bill's provisions for tackling some of the difficulties in offering permanent work for victims after completing their paid placement via Bright Future, especially as some require support to improve their language skills and work readiness. The Co-op pointed out that the section of the Bill covering the "meaning of assistance and support" did not yet specifically reference the provision of support to ensure "work readiness" and suggested in its briefing that Lord McColl consider including pre-employment training / work readiness where appropriate to the individual. As Lord McColl explained in an interview for this report, the Co-op's experience of the Bright Future programme "provided vital tangible evidence of the problems of the current system and the possibilities for rehabilitation and recovery if changes were made to long term support and immigration status for victims after a positive conclusive grounds decision."

As it brought concrete lessons from the Bright Future programme into its support for the Bill, the Co-op also evolved its modern slavery campaign responsively in order to advocate to Government for the Bill's passage and more widely for enhanced victim support. The Co-op recognised the need for greater attention on long-term survivor support as an important facet of tackling modern slavery and so set out to improve consumer and corporate awareness of the issue. It wanted people to understand how survivors are treated by the state, in order to build momentum for more survivor support.

It drew again from its learnings from the Bright Future programme—including an independent evaluation of the programme (October 2017) that recommended engaging with the Government about long-term support for survivors—for

“The Co-op's experience of the Bright Future programme “provided vital tangible evidence of the problems of the current system and the possibilities for rehabilitation and recovery...”



Pictured: Co-op AGM big screen.

extensive awareness-raising and advocacy work on the Bill, the topic of modern slavery, and survivor support, including through the media, amongst its members, colleagues and the public. This advocacy involved displaying posters on modern slavery in its stores; displaying information on modern slavery on selected sandwich packaging to raise awareness of the issue and funds for an anti-slavery organisation; using its social media presence to draw attention to the issue of modern slavery; sending thousands of emails to its members and employees asking them to contact their Member of Parliament; collecting and delivering thousands of messages to the UK government urging them to back Lord McColl's Bill; submitting numerous briefings to parliamentarians in advance of debates on modern slavery and the Bill; meeting with policy-makers; proactively engaging with journalists who wrote newspaper articles on this issue; and hosting and presenting at numerous events internationally, including at the UN and in the UK.

The Co-op's emphasis on collaboration meant that it joined forces on this advocacy work with numerous other organisations, businesses and charities in order to achieve a strong collective voice, including the Greater Manchester Modern Slavery Business Network, the British Retail Consortium, and the Co-op's own suppliers.

In addition, the Co-op's identity as a *business* meant that it could credibly and authoritatively make an important point in support of the Bill: that the benefits of longer-term support for survivors of modern slavery could outweigh the initial costs. In a submission to the Home Affairs Committee in September 2018, the Co-op explained that "not only is [there] a moral imperative to support victims but [the Co-op] believes that there is a sound cost-benefit case to provide an enhanced level of public support to victims."

The Rights Lab took up this idea and in 2019 completed a full cost-benefit analysis of Lord McColl's Bill.<sup>5</sup> We found that there would be a direct financial benefit of implementing the changes proposed in the bill that would outweigh the costs: a net overall benefit (direct and indirect) of up to £25.1m annually. This cost-benefit analysis was used as evidence in the judicial review claim by Duncan Lewis Solicitors on behalf of two modern slavery victims, NN & LP v Secretary of State for the Home Department, which resulted in the Home Office agreeing that the support should be provided in reference to an individual's needs rather than by any reference to how long the individual had been supported, and in the introduction of a needs-based system.

As Lord McColl explained in an interview for this report, it was significant that the Co-op, as a business, argued for the Bill and believed there was a financial case for longer-term victim support: "It was of significance that the Co-op brought these perspectives as a business—in my view that helped me to show that this is not just the concern of the NGO sector but also there is a business case for supporting victims' long term."

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# Lessons for business action

“Their approach has a number of planks that together are greater than the sum of their parts”

—Amelia Knott, Romanac Consulting Ltd

Today, as in the 19th century, businesses play a crucial role in the anti-slavery agenda. Beyond examining their own supply chains, businesses have multiple roles they can play in community-based action. This includes a leadership role in influencing local decision-makers, sharing intelligence with enforcement agencies, training staff and implementing good labour practices, raising awareness with clients and suppliers, and providing support for survivors.

However, whereas historically businesses were at the centre of community and civic anti-slavery action, a more globalised marketplace and the increasing dominance of online commerce means that businesses are less frequently identified with one specific town or city. In the Rights Lab's surveys of multi-agency anti-slavery partnership work across the UK, it was clear that some local partnerships were struggling to engage with business partners, with the majority of partnerships dependent upon statutory, voluntary and faith-sector partners for funding and administration.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, a number of businesses have been proactive in embracing anti-slavery campaigns. In the case of the Co-op, it provided collaborative industry leadership both in its hometown of Manchester and in multiple local communities with a three-year modern slavery campaign that leveraged its whole organisation.

## An asset-based approach

A key factor in the coherence, profile and impact of the Co-op's modern slavery campaign was its *asset-based approach*. As laid out in the previous sections, the Co-op leveraged its existing strengths and resources across the whole organisation. It built its campaign from the inside out, mobilising its members, networks and identity. By taking an asset-based approach, the Co-op could use its internal expertise and member interests without needing expensive investment in external campaign resources. Instead, equipped with a small budget to support its aims, it leveraged its existing, available assets.

This approach of carefully and pragmatically designing campaign elements that used its assets—including its identity and history as a community-based co-operative—also meant the Co-op could create a coherent whole: a series of mutually reinforcing campaign activities. Its “whole organisation” approach to campaigning, where it brought together its existing assets, enabled the Co-op to create something that, as one survey respondent described it, was “greater than the sum of their parts.” The campaign elements reinforced one another so well because each reflected part of the Co-op's explicit, existing culture.

For example, the Bright Future programme provided evidence and a platform to work on the passage of Lord McColl's Bill, and both the campaign around the Bill and Bright Future positioned the Co-op as an anti-slavery leader with the leverage to encourage other businesses to go beyond mere compliance with the MSA and take meaningful action within their supply chains and operations. In turn, the Co-op's evidence and business action on the

issue of transparency in supply chains helped it lobby for the Bill and bring other businesses into the Bright Future programme. As one survey respondent explained, “the Co-op comes across as leading by example and committing their business to addressing modern slavery, not simply raising awareness. This makes their campaigning much more effective.” In both interviews and survey responses, external stakeholders understood that the Co-op could campaign authentically and effectively on victim support in part because it was committed to tackling modern slavery in its own operations.

A key asset that the Co-op used for its mutually-reinforcing campaign elements—a whole organisation approach—was its identity as a co-operative. Repeatedly, survey respondents pointed to the Co-op's approach of working *together* with other businesses in partnership on the issue of modern slavery, rather than seeking to create an anti-slavery hierarchy—or what a survey respondent from Greencore described as an “edict” approach: “Think they are the one retailer that I can see tangible results from of their support. Their impact has been immense. Very much so as it has been through guidance and working together rather than as an edict.”

Another business respondent termed it a “broad church” approach: “The Co-op tried to make it a broad church by partnering with other companies.” The Co-op's collaborative values also supported its close work with leading survivor support charities to pioneer its employment scheme for survivors of slavery.

A second key asset that the Co-op used was of course its identity as a business—whether suggesting there would be a positive cost-benefit case of long-term survivor support, creating a *work* programme for survivors, or leading by example on transparency in supply chains. The Co-op's strong historic roots in social entrepreneurship and ethical trading supported its vigorous approach to monitoring supply chains, as well as its decision to take action itself with Bright Future.

A business respondent to the survey for this report explained the importance of this business example to their own company, including the shift in perspective towards understanding “value creation”: “The Co-op's campaigning activities are effective, proactive, out-of-the box, and sensitive to survivors....It helped our leadership see this space as far more than compliance and see how it links to purpose and to value creation as well if done in the right way.”

Another survey respondent, from Pilgrims Ltd, confirmed that the Co-op had led by example as a business, not only by driving the anti-slavery agenda, but also by providing practical solutions like Bright Future's work programme or supply chain insights: “The campaign has led the field amongst retailers in tackling and supporting victims directly of Modern Slavery, leading by example and driving an agenda that is sometimes hidden. [The Co-op] gave us the practical solutions to enable us to help and support victims better and understand their point of view. Also raise awareness in our own operations.”

By recognising the importance of an asset-based, whole organisation approach, the Co-op was able to leverage its unique, co-operative identity to lead by example, and collaboratively.

“This approach of carefully and pragmatically designing campaign elements that used its assets...meant the Co-op could create a coherent whole: a series of mutually reinforcing campaign activities.”



## Takeaways for businesses

In commissioning this report about its campaign's transferable lessons, the Co-op is leading by example again—trying to make its experiences useful to other businesses. To that end, we have designed eight key takeaways for businesses from the Co-op's example:

- 1. Identity.** A coherent campaign should be rooted in a company's identity, vision and values. An integrity-based, "whole organisation" approach can help a business communicate its aims effectively, leverage the brand's identity for change, and generate greater brand loyalty. The Co-op's choice to tackle modern slavery and support survivors was deeply rooted in its values, history and its commitment to doing business differently, which makes it a trusted messenger in its communities.
- 2. Leadership.** Effective campaigning requires senior level commitment to translate values into action and bring attention to causes. On his first day as CEO of the Co-op, Steve Murrells' first press release was not about corporate plans, but about the Bright Future programme and advocating for survivors. This put a spotlight on the Co-op's modern slavery work and gave a bigger platform to the issue of survivor support.
- 3. Employees.** A key awareness-raising and advocacy asset for campaigning activities are employees, and engaging employees in social justice campaigning can also lead to increased loyalty towards the brand and business. The Co-op mobilised its workforce to support its work on modern slavery. It sent over 600,000 emails to its employees encouraging them to take actions such as fundraising, contacting politicians and learning more about the issue.
- 4. Consumer engagement.** An organisation can leverage its relationship with its own consumers to help raise awareness of its campaign causes. The Co-op, as a business owned by its members, was able to engage with members/consumers to promote awareness and activity. The Co-op did this in several ways, including by emailing its members and displaying information on modern slavery in its stores and on selected products. The Co-op also asked its members to support the Free for Good campaign that is working to pass Lord McColl's Victim Support Bill. This resulted in over 5,000 emails to MPs. A survey of 254 Co-op members found that 63% were encouraged to find out more about the issue because of the Co-op's messages to its membership.
- 5. Sector engagement.** Collectively, businesses can make significant strides in campaigning by pooling their knowledge, resources, influence, and reach. The Co-op recognised that one of its biggest assets is that it is a *business*: this meant it could lead by example, collaborate, and be a powerful messenger to other businesses. It actively sought ways to engage in knowledge-exchange with other businesses, encourage collaboration, and motivate organisations to do more. For instance, it encouraged 23 businesses to join the Bright Future programme, set up a modern slavery business network, and sent over 100 emails to businesses urging them to sign the Anti-Slavery Charter.
- 6. Policy engagement.** Businesses can have significant influence when engaging with policy-makers compared to other organisations which might find it more challenging to be heard. The Co-op briefed parliamentarians ahead of important debates on modern slavery, in order to support them in advocating for survivor support and for enhanced corporate reporting on modern slavery. It also became part of the Free for Good campaign, the only business to do so.

- 7. Multi-stakeholder collaboration.** Collaborating with other organisations that have specialist expertise can facilitate better knowledge-exchange and complement a campaign's activities and reach. The Co-op collaborated with numerous anti-slavery stakeholders to strengthen its work. For instance, it collaborated with City Hearts and a number of other charities to identify survivors to join the Bright Future programme, and is currently working with St. Mary's University to develop a summer school that will equip survivors with skills to secure work.
- 8. Multiple communication channels.** Businesses can increase their reach into difference target audiences and increase support for campaign causes by using various and multiple communication channels that to consider the audience demographic. The Co-op had a mixed-channel communication strategy involving social media, emails and press releases to connect with people. For instance, it partnered with Global Citizen – a US-based non-profit Global Poverty Project – which resulted in over 9,000 emails and 5,000 tweets to MPs, and over 4,000 emails and 800 tweets to then Prime Minister Theresa May.



Pictured: Mural – image from Hestia's 'Art is Freedom' project.

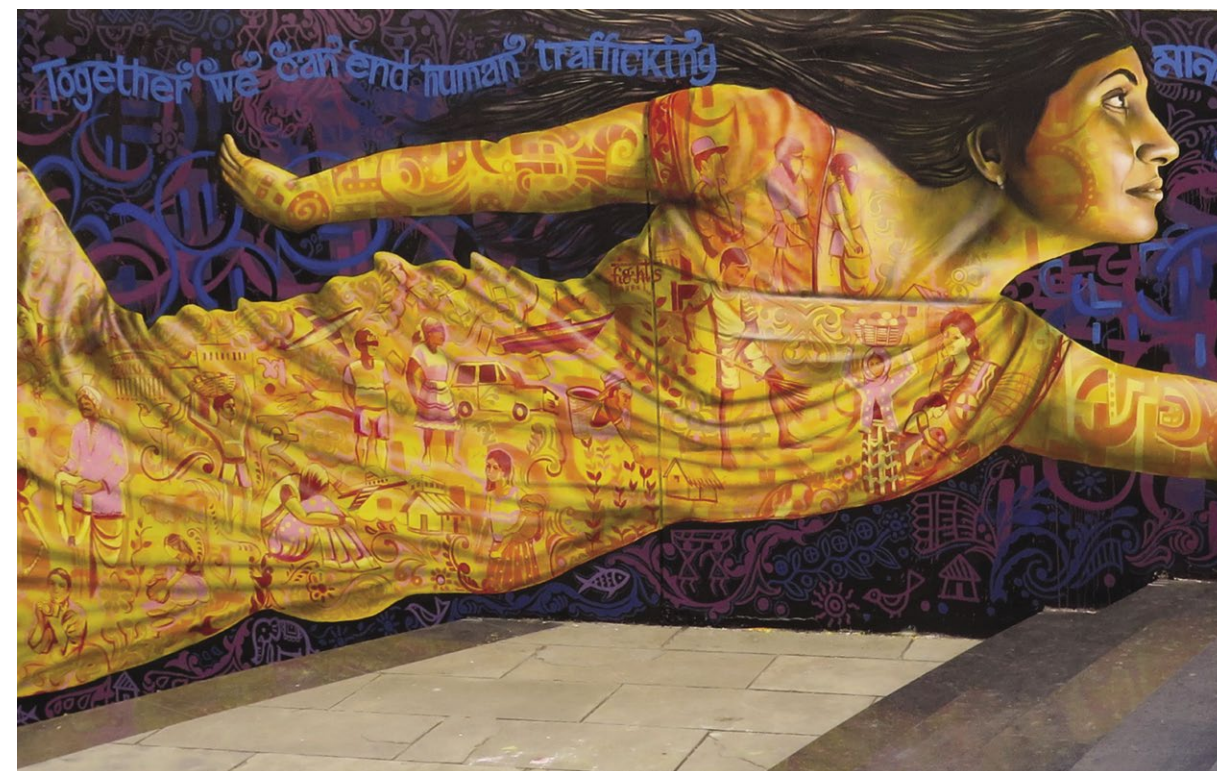


## The Freedom Dividend

The Co-op's modern slavery campaign embodies what we term in the Rights Lab a "Freedom Dividend." We know from our research that where slavery is suppressed, the economy grows—and for survivors of slavery, this can mean the chance of transformation. When freedom comes to formerly enslaved people, and includes the enjoyment of human rights, learning and training for job skills, and access to medical and psychological care, the whole society receives a Freedom Dividend: increases in economic attainment and education levels, and reductions in health problems and gender inequality, among other all-society benefits.

The Freedom Dividend is a theory about change. In the case of the Co-op's work on modern slavery, the dividend was evident to the stakeholders who we interviewed and surveyed for this report. The Co-op's impact reached far beyond its own supply chain monitoring: it generated a Freedom Dividend through a work programme where people freed from slavery rebuilt their lives and could go on to create stronger local economies and communities. After being forced to work for others' profit, survivors could now work, train, and recover what our Rights Lab colleague Minh Dang and co-authors have called "a full freedom."<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the Co-op's campaign brought education to its members and the wider public, along with the opportunity to be part of transforming lives through ethical purchasing and support for Bright Future and the Victim Support Bill.

Like the Co-op's own dividend system—where it shares profits ('dividends') amongst its members rather than rewarding outside investors—the Freedom Dividend rewards everyone who invests in it. And during a pandemic that has caused businesses to consider their wider, social purpose, the example of the Co-op's asset-based approach can encourage other organisations to design their own, unique roles in social action, leverage their own assets to work against injustice and for human rights, and help to achieve the Freedom Dividend.



Pictured: Together We Can End Human Trafficking mural by Joel Bergner and community partners.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Rights Lab, "Impact of COVID-19 on Modern Slavery Survivors in the UK & USA" (2021).
- <sup>2</sup> International Labour Organization and Walk Free, "Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage" (2017).
- <sup>3</sup> [www.antislavery.org/anti-slavery-charter/](http://www.antislavery.org/anti-slavery-charter/)
- <sup>4</sup> <https://responsiblerecruitmenttoolkit.org/>
- <sup>5</sup> Rights Lab, "The Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill: A Cost-Benefit Analysis" (2019).
- <sup>6</sup> Rights Lab, "Partnerships for Freedom: Improving Multi-Agency Collaboration on Modern Slavery" (2020) and Right Lab and the Office of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, "Collaborating for Freedom: Anti-Slavery Partnerships in the UK" (2017).
- <sup>7</sup> Andrea Nicholson, Minh Dang, and Zoe Trodd, "A Full Freedom: Contemporary Survivors' Definitions of Slavery," *Human Rights Law Review* 18.4 (2018): 689-704.







Hestia is the leading provider of modern slavery support in London, having supported more than 4,300 victims since the service began in 2011. Now, their modern slavery work has grown to support more than 2,200 adult victims and 1,200 dependent children every year, through their outreach support, seven safe houses in London and the South East, and long-term community-based support through their award winning volunteer-led Phoenix project. Hestia have partnered with the Co-op Group via their Bright Future programme and wider research projects.

Art Is Freedom is Hestia's annual photography and art exhibition, featuring work captured and created by survivors of modern slavery, and marking Anti-Slavery Day on 18th October. The exhibition enables survivors of modern slavery to creatively tell their story and express their recovery journey with the aim of highlighting the prevalence of modern slavery in the UK today.

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